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ARNAUD TONUS
COMING HOME

Story Geoff Meyer Images Ray Archer

When you talk about riders with great techniques and a strong build to suit the MXGP class, then you are talking about Arnaud Tonus. The Swizz rider recently signed with the Wilvo Yamaha MXGP team, and will along side Shaun Simpson in the coming two years. His return to Europe is in a good place. While Tonus is coming off a couple of tough seasons in America, the always professional rider showed brilliant results at this years Monster Energy Motocross of Nations in Italy, and proved that his speed on the 450 machine is more than good enough to run with just about anyone in the tough MXGP class.

PRO CIRCUIT
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We were lucky enough to catch up with Arnaud today and asked him about his US experience and coming back to race in Europe.

Motocross Illustrated: Obviously your goal was to be successful in America, and that didn't work out, but you must be happy to be back home in Switzerland?

Tonus: For sure, there is always a nice side. Whatever I was going to do was going to be cool, but coming back to Europe it's a new bike, a new class, and it's the right time to ride the 450 for me. It's a big challenge, because the MXGP class is very competitive. I am also really happy with the deal I have for next year with Yamaha and Wilvo. Louis (Vosters) was really motivated to make it work and so were Yamaha. I think its great for me and like you said it feels great being with the family in Switzerland.

MXIll: You mentioned the MXGP class is competitive and there seems to be a fine line between being 15th and being 5th. If you look at somebody like Tommy (Searle) who has won a bunch of GPs and he can't take any lucky breaks. If you don't have everything going your way it's really tough. What do you think you need to be around the top group?

Tonus: I think it will be about being solid. Like you said it's really tough competition. I think I can do something good in the MXGP class. I experienced the same in America, with the 250 class, if you get a bad start it was really difficult to come through and back into the top five, and I know it's a different class, but the top 15 were really fast. I needed to work on being aggressive and making my place. Although I wasn't 100%, I learnt you are never in a comfort zone and you need to push yourself and always fight for even one position.

MXIll: Is sounds like the perfect preperation for the MXGP class?

Tonus: It was, definitely. Going there (to America) everything is new and you need to adapt yourself. It didn't go my way there, and

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that happens in this sport. I mean I had to be stronger mentally that will help me out next year. I know I won't be in a comfort zone and you need to fight for every single position, I know that.

MXIII: Starts are critical in MXGP, how are your starts?

Tonus: Usually not great, but on a 250 I was pretty heavy, I was like 20 kilos over most of the guys there. I have only had a few starts on the 450 and it's gone alright. Glen Helen was ok, and des Nations was very good. One race I was second and the other race I was sixth or seventh, so that was good. It was a lot better than I was on the 250 and I now have the confidence on the start. We will also have a lot of time to get the bike perfect for starts and we have good parts, so it should be ok.

MXIII: That des Nations, it was just a crazy race, as it always is. You had some good moments at the des Nations, going 4-4-8 for your three motos over the weekend. You beat a lot of guys you will line-up against in 2017. Can you explain how that felt?

Tonus: Nations is always something special, but this one was big for me. I had a lot of ups and downs and been through some hard times, so finishing the season on a high note like that. It's hard to explain how you feel behind the gate, with all the atmosphere with the crowd and everything and you are riding for your nation. I think that helps your racing, because you are in suc ha good mood and you are just happy to ride. Its races like that that make you realize why you are doing this kind of sport. That was really cool. My riding, everyone was surprised, but I kind of knew I was capable of doing that and I just needed to put everything together. It didn't surprise me, but it was nice to be out front. I am going to work hard in the winter, because I couldn't do that in America with the virus and I am looking forward to whats coming.

MXIII: You had some good results last time you were in Europe and when you went to America a lot of people figured you would do well. We knew you were one of the quality guys and if you put the two classes together (MXGP and MX2) you were one of the top guys. We saw with Villopoto it's tough changing classes, but what made it so difficult racing in America for you?

Tonus: What made it difficult was my health. I mean first I hurt my wrist and still my speed was good, but at times I was there with the guys, but just not long enough. I wasn't fit and three races in I started feeling tired and found out I had epstein-barr virus and other virus's. Having that is bad enough when you are in an environment that you are comfortable with, and my English is ok, but sometimes I couldn't understand what they were saying. It makes it so difficult, I had no base. I think the level is different, more so in supercross, but if you go there in shape, we have the level to compete at front. I mean even if europe I would have struggled with the condition I had in America.

MXIII: I mean you have raced with Herlings, who in my opinion is the best guy. You are one of the few guys who has been able to race with him, obviously Tommy (Searle) also did. Tommy hasn't been able to transfer that form into the MXGP class. Tim raced a little with Jeffrey, but Romain never really was able to compete with Jeffrey. Does it give you a little confidence knowing you have raced with Jeffrey in the past.

Tonus: When you ride with Herlings, and you are on that type of speed, everything clicking, and it's really hard to be consistently on his speed. Sometimes you can reach it, and you are there, but it's hard every weekend. For sure I am confident on what I can do, have a good winter preperation, and trust my body again, because for a long time I had a fear or doing too much or not enough. Being tired, or whatever. When I had the virus, and thought it had passed, I start-

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ed riding again, and it came back and it took me a long time to recover and trust my body. Now I am happy I have time to be 100%.

MXIII: Its hard to find healthy food there.

Tonus: You can find healthy good, but the quality of the food isn't good. My girlfriend was cooking great, but the chicken or whatever wasn't the same quality and I think when you are born there, you are used to it and your body reacts differently. I come from Switzerland, a country that probably has the biggest control over the quality of food. My body was getting used to their stuff and going to America was a big step. I don't know why they have that problem more there. For sure the programs are different, they spend more time on the bike. I think the food is a big part, but its hard to know. We have a lot better quality of food in Europe and I think when you go to America for a week or two you don't feel it, but if you go for a longer time, you feel it.

MXIII: Tell me, working with Shaun, he has shown the potential to win GP's and he is a regular top ten guy. He is a good guy and seems to be the sort of guy who would share information. He seems like the perfect team-mate. Are you looking forward to working with Shaun?

Tonus: I think he is the perfect team-mate. We rode together in Steve Dixons team and we worked well together and we have a great relationship. I think it will be cool and like you said he is open minded and I hope we spend time together during the winter to help each other get stronger. I am looking forward to having him as a team-mate, but all the crew is looking forward to having us on the team and we already have a good feel with everyone.

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When Only First Counts

Story Geoff Meyer Images Ray Acher

Romain Febvre might be in the middle of his off-season, but the likeable Frenchman isn't taking it easy. Having raced in the SMX a few weeks ago, and last weekends Arnhem Supercross, the 2015 World MXGP champion is still looking forward to lining up at the Bercy Supercross in two weeks and giving Supercross another shot. While this year wasn't as good as 2015, Febvre still showed that he is amongst the best motocross riders in the world, winning a handful of GP's, a moto at the MXoN, a moto at the SMX, and a moto at the Arnhem Supercross. His consistency is what might make him tough to beat in 2017.

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We caught up with Febvre and asked him about his season, and his expectations for his home supercross in Lille on November 12 and 13.

MXIII: Romain, you are obviously new at supercross, but have experience in supermoto and of course motocross. Do you have the same motivation for supercross as it's really just fun races for you?

Febvre: No, I was am excited to ride Supercross. I did it the first time last year at Bercy, and it was my first time on a Supercross track on the 450. It was tricky, but I enjoy it and this year I wanted to do more and get more confidence. I want a good weekend in Bercy.

MXIII: The 2016 season didn't go completely to plan. You started really well, but then had the injury and the last part of the season was also not that impressive. Can you explain how it all went?

Febvre: Lets say without the injury it was possible to get the title. I started good and was leading the championship, then I was right behind Gajser, really close until England, like 20 points behind. Then I had that crash in England and missed two rounds and then it was impossible to battle of the title. I am looking forward to next year.

MXLII: It was a horrible crash in England and a head injury is always something that needs time. How was that period for you?

Febvre: It took some time, I had a concussion and I have nerve damage in my right eye and I needed like a month to get good again and then I took the bike only two weeks before Loket and coming back to a podium straight away, which was really good. Maybe not enough to come back on the championship, so the last four rounds we tried things with the bike to improve the start and the starts were better, but not the racing and I knew it wasn't me, but the changes we made. It

YAMAHA
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is good for next year because we already have some good things from this year.

MXIII: You once again showed brilliance at the MXoN. 2015 you went 1-1 and won, but this year you won a moto and passed Searle for the victory. Which was better for you?

Febvre: Well, last year, it was my first time and the first is always difficult to be better, plus I won both motos, and it was in France, so with the home crowd that was tough to beat that feeling. This year, it was again good, we ended the championship and we went back to the good settings and my riding change compeletely. Then I felt strong and we were really happy. I won a moto and like you said I passed Searle to win for Team France.

MXIII: What did you think of the SMX in Veltins Arena?

Febvre: I think the SMX was good, the track and the racing was really nice, it was a pity there wasn't much of a crowd and the racing was close and mixed, we had three different race winners and I think the riders had a lot of fun doing it.

MXIII: Some people on social media said the track was too easy. How did you find it?

Febvre: I think the track was good, it had to be safe and no scary jumps and to build a circuit in a stadium I thought the laps would be like 30 seconds, but it was a minute and I think they did a good job. Also the show wasn't bad. It was a shame not many people came.

MXIII: Next year Jeffrey Herlings is coming to the MXGP class. He showed at the MXoN, and the SMX that he is fast. He has beaten you and Tim in the past. Does that give you more motivation for 2016?

Febvre: I think I don't need motivation, and for sure he is really good, he will be one of the best, but motivation I have enough and I know what I need to do. It would be better if I win, because he will be there. We race to win and the riders all want that. For sure next year will be good, I think a lot of guys fighting for the win.

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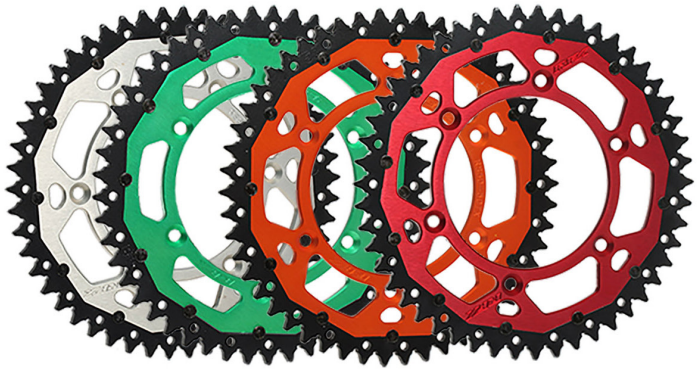

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REDEFINING LIMITS

Jorge Prado

Story Tinus Nel images Ray Archer and Bavo Swijgers

If you are fortunate enough to have followed international motocross racing for a number of years, inevitably some golden moments will present themselves to be filed in that corner of your brain where pleasant memories are stored. Among the rider corps there are heroes aplenty. Old favourites pull huge rabbits out of the hat. Young whipper-snappers enter the arena and deliver performances that have the collective viewership gasping. Epic battles that would not have been out of place on medieval battlefields play out before our very eyes.

We've seen all of that and more. Yet with all of that having been said, on the afternoon of 28 August 2016 the editorial jaw dropped onto the floor with an audible thud. On the screen a fierce battle was playing out. At the front of the pack, in the deep, deep sand of Assen, two motorcycles were darting across the rises and skipping through the craters like sand rabbits. It was a sand dance, performed at unbelievable speed. It was mesmerizing. It was beautiful. It was the day on which Jorge Prado announced his arrival in the motocross world championship series with imperiousness that had never been seen before. Ever.

One of the duo of bikes fighting it out for honours in that eventful final MX2 moto of the Dutch GP carried the number 84. That computed well. Jeffrey Herlings, avowed sand master, on the trot and about to collect his third world title. But he was not leading. The bike up front was sporting the number 61, which had the cognoscenti agog. That particular number had not yet featured in an MX2 GP race during the year, so surely this was a newcomer. The home crowd erupted in joy as Herlings finally made the pass. But it was not over. In a cheeky move reminiscent of a little honey badger taking food away from a lion, the little man on the #61 machine struck back. Bedlam. Herlings being repassed? On sand? This quite simply does not happen.

Herlings finally prevailed. His exasperation on track because of the unexpected resistance had turned into respect, and the two warriors embraced. Then the helmet of rider #61 came off, revealing a fresh-faced youth, one that would not have looked out of place on an 85cc machine. Jorge Prado's GP debut would forever be seared into fans' memories as perhaps the greatest ever.

It's not as if the youngster didn't give early notice of the drama that was to follow, either. On Saturday, during qualifying proceedings, he posted the third fastest time in the practice session, less than a second behind Herlings. Then, in the qualifying race, he pulled an epic holeshot out of thin air and scampered off to a stunning victory. He had fired a shot across the bows of the opposition. This was not a rookie that was about to cower in the corner.

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KTM

This story simply begged for the telling of it. Getting hold of a young man on the move is no mean feat, though. There were still a few GP's to go, he splits home time between his bases in Spain and Belgium, and, emerging hero or not, there is still the tedious matter of schoolwork to take care of. Patience is often a rewarded virtue, though, and finally the WhatsApp lit up with a message. Jorge Prado had found himself a corner of serenity and was ready to talk.

Some people are just so irresistibly engaging that you feel as if you're being swamped by a litter of puppy-breath Husky cuties. So it is when interviewing this young man. He bubbles with enthusiasm and babbles unprompted, often answering three questions in advance. He remains deferential, though, and there is not a hint of haughtiness about him. He loves his sport and, as it turns out, is very, very good at it.

Jorge's motorcyling story starts at the tender age of three, when a trials bike made its way onto the living room floor disguised as a present. Dad was a motocross racer before, although no

great shakes, but the love of motorcycling clearly ran deep. Jorge's skills developed, and when he was six years old, he expressed the wish to be mounted on something a with a bit more bite, and the first motocross bike appeared.

The first successes came fairly quickly, and Jorge soon proved to be the tiny tyke to beat in the 50cc regional series where he participated. This is the class where parents often cover more distance next to the track than the riders do on it, and where the riders are scarcely higher than the boots that they will wear later on in their careers. Being tiny does not mean that the riders are any less competitive, though. In some races, Jorge was pitted against the much faster 65cc machines, and there he encountered his first great rival, a rider that was later to move on to some acclaim in the European Championships. The rivalry served them both well, and Jorge gave the first hints that he was able to punch far above his weight.

Once he got onto a 65cc machine himself and was given free reign to hook the shifter, he quite literally took off. His reputation as a quality competitor grew rapidly, and he did not disappoint,

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as trophies for the European – and world titles in the 65cc class duly made their way onto the mantelpiece. The talent scouts had taken notice, too, and the KTM brass came trotting along, contract in hand.

The move to the 85cc class brought its shares of heartache and pain for the youngster. Three seasons in a row were interrupted by injuries, but when he was on the bike, he underscored the fact that he was a rare talent in the making. With no major titles to show for his 85cc years, he moved onto the bigger 125cc machine, and in 2015 he left near permanent bootprints on podiums across Europe on his way to securing the EMX125 European championship title.

With that achievement in hand, Jorge moved onto the 250cc grunter, planning his 2016 season around participation in the EMX2 class. Even as a newcomer in this, a very, very competitive series, he quickly reacquainted himself with his old friend, the podium, and would eventually finish seventh in the championship, despite missing three events. Some early-season scheming would set the scene for his remarkable day, though. "We decided that we would participate in a few GP's when the opportunity was there," he reminisced. "We especially focused on GP's in deep sand at Lommel and Assen, because I spend a lot of time in Belgium and like riding in the sand."

Jorge's true GP debut was to be at Lommel, but he crashed heavily during the practice sessions on Saturday, doing things to his collarbone that his designer had not intended. He gritted it out and lined up for the qualifying race, but come Sunday, he was cross-eyed from pain, and his first GP proved to be a non-starter. "The doctor first said that the collarbone and dislocated and quickly popped back in, but when we had it checked out after the weekend, it was actually broken."

The injury sidelined Jorge for a while in the period leading up to the Dutch GP, and he only had two weeks' worth of preparation leading up to the race. Those in the know will tell you that a motocross race in deep sand is one of this world's great physical challenges, particularly so on a track like Assen that can swallow entire moon buggies without so much as a burp.

"The injury definitely affected my confidence, and I was hoping that I could maybe get a top ten finish in my first GP

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MOTOREX
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where I actually got to race," he remembers. "When the qualifying race came along, I relied on my start, which is always a strong point for me, and I won the race.

That gave me a lot of confidence for Sunday's motos. There was no pressure on me. I was not fighting for the title or anything, it was really just an opportunity to measure myself against the GP guys and check out what level I'm at."

A deluge that would possibly have warranted a mention in the Bible turned the track into a quagmire early on Sunday morning. Jorge was a bit tentative in the first race, and finished 12th. Then the sun broke through and the organisers did an amazing job of clearing the track. The second moto was going to be epic.

The young man went to his pole position gate with his heart bursting. "I just knew this would be my race," he recalls fondly. As the gate dropped, he rocketed into the lead, and that set the scene for the tableau we described earlier on. It was pure art. When the scores were tallied, he was third overall, a quite sensational GP result for a fifteen year old rider on debut.

The media swamped him. The race was one of those that tend to stick in your memory, and, as we've alluded to before, the sight of a rider repassing Herlings on a sandy track, particularly so a young rider such as this, will in all probability never be witnessed again. The battle brought the riders perilously close to each other at times, and with Herlings on the cusp of securing the title, there was a risk that he could crash out and injure himself. "I was thinking of that, of course, but I was having fun and it was a great battle. If I were in the same situation again, I'd do it just the same," beams he across the telephone line. One can almost see his eyes twinkling.

The sensational world championship debut made another decision quite easy to make. Jorge would fly to the USA to participate in the last two GP's of the season. He had in fact visited the Land of the Free and the Home of the Interminable Presidential Election before on training trips, but even so, the long flight took its toll on him. He scored points in both GP's but wasn't entirely chuffed with his outings. "I was really not feeling myself during the trip," he recalls. "At the first race I was still suffering from jet lag, and did not have much energy. I also had a stomach bug, and really did not always

PIRELLI
MOTOREX
ATHENA

feel up to racing. At Glen Helen, it went better, but the track is very challenging and requires a lot of strength, and in that respect I lost out to the older riders and lost positions as the races went on." Back in Europe, Jorge's mind has clicked into gear for his 2017 preparations. He has his feet planted firmly on the ground and realizes there is a lot to learn still, but feels if everything swings his way, a top five result in the series should be possible. Again this prediction is delivered in a charming way, without a hint of boastfulness. One thing is certain, though. A lot more people are going to be aware of the number 61 in 2017. The number, incidentally, came as the result of a happy memory. "I started racing with the number 46, because I was a huge fan of Valentino Rossi, but then at one championship event, there was another rider with that number already, and they gave me number 22. When I came to the Masterkids event in Belgium, the number 22 was also taken, so my race number was 61. I won the event, so it seemed like a good idea to keep the number." Life is about more than motocross, though. Even when he is off the bike, the need for speed is never far from Jorge's mind. He likes to while away his free time on a mountainbike or BMX, and his latest hobby has him feverishly twiddling the controls as he sends his radio controlled racing car skittering around the track. Before his motocross career became an all-consuming passion, he was also a competitive swimmer.

Jorge's worldwide travels and constant switch in bases between Belgium and Spain have endowed him with another set of talents – he's become quite the multi-linguist. He can rattle on in his native Spanish, but also in Galician, a language of the Northwest region which also unlocks the marvels of Portuguese. His English is impeccable, and he has good control of Dutch, which endears him to his Belgian hosts. As if that weren't enough, he is studying French at school, and it is fair to say that he'll be able to handle a podium interview in any of a number of languages.

In the blink of an eye, half an hour had poured through the sand timer, and a happy memory of a most delightful interview remained. Here is a young man, engaging but polite, driven but modest, and one can not but sign up to the fan club.

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A Family Experience

Story Geoff Meyer images Nuno/FIM

Team USA rider Alex Martin really put on a great performance to finish second MX2 rider at this years MXoN, and help his team comeback from a horrible Saturday qualification day, to finish third overall in this years Monster Energy Motocross of Nations. The young Team USA rookie sure looked strong all weekend and despite his crashes on Saturday and what seems his overzealous performance, he came into Sunday really well prepared and hardly made any errors. We were lucky enough to catch up with this very friendly and professional rider, and asked him about his weekend.

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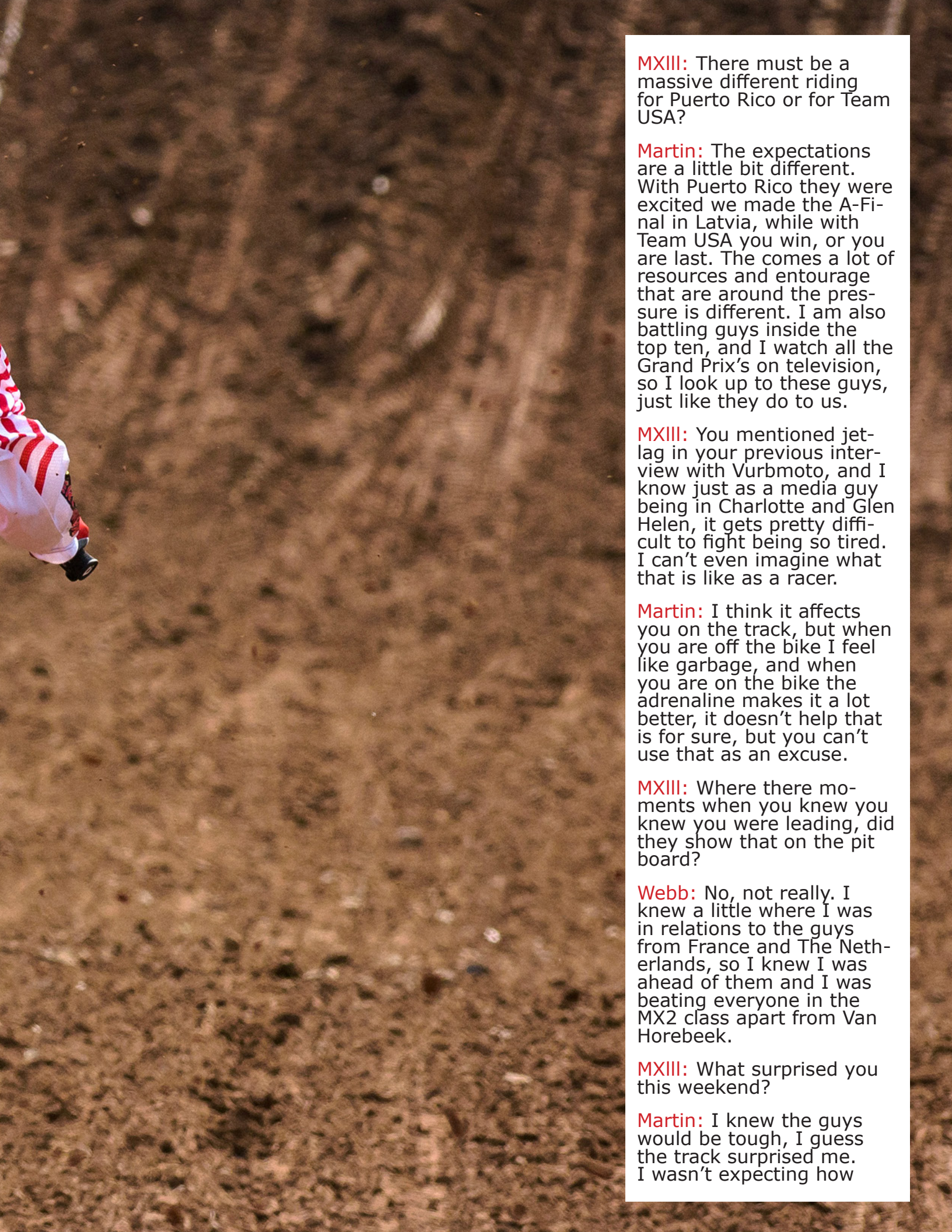

MXIII: There must be a massive different riding for Puerto Rico or for Team USA?

Martin: The expectations are a little bit different. With Puerto Rico they were excited we made the A-Final in Latvia, while with Team USA you win, or you are last. The comes a lot of resources and entourage that are around the pressure is different. I am also battling guys inside the top ten, and I watch all the Grand Prix's on television, so I look up to these guys, just like they do to us.

MXIII: You mentioned jetlag in your previous interview with Vurbmoto, and I know just as a media guy being in Charlotte and Glen Helen, it gets pretty difficult to fight being so tired. I can't even imagine what that is like as a racer.

Martin: I think it affects you on the track, but when you are off the bike I feel like garbage, and when you are on the bike the adrenaline makes it a lot better, it doesn't help that is for sure, but you can't use that as an excuse.

MXIII: Where there moments when you knew you knew you were leading, did they show that on the pit board?

Webb: No, not really. I knew a little where I was in relations to the guys from France and The Netherlands, so I knew I was ahead of them and I was beating everyone in the MX2 class apart from Van Horebeek.

MXIII: What surprised you this weekend?

Martin: I knew the guys would be tough, I guess the track surprised me. I wasn't expecting how

many hills and how steep the hills were. I knew the dirt would be hard pack and rocky, but I was pretty impressed with the track.

MXIII: Roger mentioned after Saturday he was concerned you guys were in the B-Final, but you guys pulled together and really did well on Sunday. How did you feel after Saturday?

Martin: I think I am proud of how we did. After Saturday I was like, wow, we are not on point right now. If you asked me Sunday morning if we would get third I might have taken that, but to come into Sunday, and be two points ahead in that last moto, then have Cooper go down, it was a stab in the gut, but overall we came back from a lot of adversity.

MXIII: It has been a tough weekend for you guys, but in the end you all fought really hard.

Martin: We were in the hunt down to the last lap today, and it's no secret that we had a lot of adversity yesterday and today. But it's a really cool event to be part of and have two top 10 finishes today. Congrats to Team France and Team Netherlands today, this was a great weekend and I'm proud to take part in it.

MXIII: Next year the event will be at home for you, and I am sure you want to be on that team?

Martin: Sure, hopefully next year have a good year and get on the team again. I will be switching brands, but now I have experience in the event I hope they consider me.

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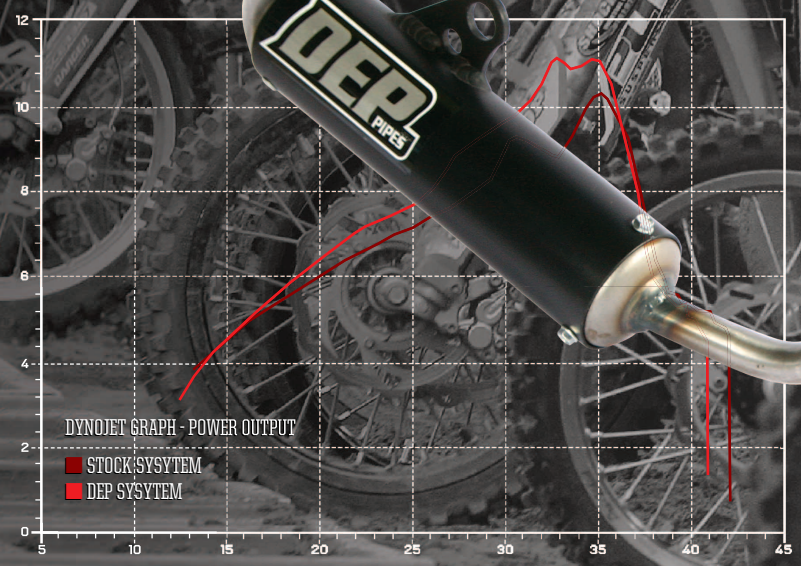

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